

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 KATHMANDU 001571

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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: WEEKLY NEPAL MEDIA REPORT: AUGUST 12 TO 18, 2003

- STATE FOR NP, AC, PM
- STATE FOR IN/R/MR
- STATE FOR SA/INS, PM/CBM, PM/PRO
- STATE FOR SA/PPD

11. PEACE TALKS

-- Third round of peace talks: The government conceded (8/17) two key demands of the Maoists – an interim government that would also include them and a round table conference – but rejected their demand for a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. The Maoists said they were disappointed by the government's proposal. "You cannot resolve the problems the country has been facing for the last 234 years on the basis of the government's proposal," Dr. Baburam Bhattarai commented. Dr. Bhattarai said the chances of the talks' success were getting dimmer. The Maoists called the government's proposal a "hopeless offer and an attempt aimed at mere cosmetic changes in the present political system." Dr. Bhattarai expressed his unhappiness over what he said was the government's total silence on the issue of restructuring the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) and their earlier demand that the king should have nothing to do with it. (Pro-India "Himalayan Times," E/D and centrist "Kathmandu Post," E/D, 8/18)

-- Prachanda's reaction: If the government's concept paper is its final stance, everybody should know, the talks have failed, Maoist leader Prachanda said Sunday. (Independent "Nepal Samacharpatra," V/D, 8/18)

-- Parties unimpressed: The political agenda the government revealed Sunday has failed to impress the political parties, the portrayed third party in the peace process. ("The Himalayan Times," 8/18)

-- Parties' stance over talks: Nepali Congress leader Girija Prasad Koirala urged the government talks team that whatever agreement is reached between the two sides must be endorsed by a reinstated parliament.

("The Himalayan Times," 8/17) Madhav Kumar Nepal, general secretary of the UML, disclosed that the agitating political parties were ready to cooperate with the government-Maoists peace negotiation if the dissolved House of Representatives was reinstated or an all-party government formed. (Centrist "Kantipur," V/D, 8/17)

-- Maintain bottom line: Maoist students: The Maoists' student wing warned of revolt against the party leaders if the bottom line of the elections for the constituent assembly was not maintained. (Media reports, 8/17)

-- Government to be flexible: The King has extended best wishes for the good results of the talks. The government is ready to be flexible on all issues except on the issues of king and democracy. ("Nepal Samacharpatra," 8/16)

-- Talks team leaders appointed: The government has designated Finance Minister Dr. Prakash Chandra Lohani as the convener of the government talks team, whereas Minister of Information and Communications Kamal Thapa has been designated as member-secretary of the team. ("The Himalayan

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Times," 8/16)

-- Maoists must lay down arms: Indian envoy: Indian Ambassador to Nepal Shyam Saran

Thursday asked the Maoist rebels to lay down their arms and come to people to pave the way for a lashing peace in the country. Ambassador Saran's assertions, which come in the wake of Maoist's visibly soft and appeasing approach towards India and strident hardline against the U.S., assume significance in the context of "global axis" against terrorism. ("The Kathmandu Post," 8/15)

-- Government sincere and truthful: PM Thapa: Prime Minister Surya Bahadur Thapa said (8/12) the government was fully aware of the price that the country would have to pay if there was any deceit by any side in conduct of the peace process.

"The government will be fully sincere in the upcoming peace talks, and expects the same from the Maoists as well as the political parties. Any deceit will land the country in a deep crisis," Thapa told "The Kathmandu Post" during an informal chat reiterating that "there is absolutely no truth, not even an iota, that the security forces will try to kill or arrest the Maoist negotiating team members." "I am fully aware of the implications of such foolish acts" and nothing could be far from the truth than this kind of imagination, he said. ("The Kathmandu Post," 8/13)

-- Peace talks: " Foreign involvement is a double-edged sword. Despite post 9/11 convergence of geopolitical interest in the region, India and China are still suspicious of increased American presence in the Himalaya. Both have ruled out outside mediation even in the peace process, saying that it would give a legitimate government and rebel forces equal status " (Nepali Times, 8/15)

12. SECURITY FORCE, MAOIST CLASHES

-- Talks day action sees 17 killed: At least 17 armed Maoist rebels and a policeman were killed in clashes in Ramechap and Dolakha districts on Sunday. ("The Himalayan Times," 8/18)

-- Abduction: A group of armed Maoists abducted five policemen in Bhojpur district on Tuesday night. (Media reports, 8/15)

-- Maoists kill soldier, abduct another: The Maoists brutally killed a soldier of the Royal Nepal Army after abducting him from his home in Nuwakot district on Monday, security sources said. (Media reports, 8/14)

-- Five Maoists killed, 2 soldiers injured: Five Maoists were killed (8/11) and two security personnel, including a Royal Nepal Army major, seriously injured in an encounter in Kailali district. ("Kantipur," 8/12)

13. POLITICAL AFFAIRS

-- King Gyanendra to be constructive, not active: In an exclusive meeting, King Gyanendra told the editor of "Nepal" that he didn't "want to be an active king but rather a constructive king." When asked about the recent demand by political parties that his wealth be declared, he said he had nothing in private possession. Everything he possesses is that of the state. It passes from one king to another; it is not lost and is not going to be taken away by anyone. On the question whether Maoist leaders could meet him, he said that was not impossible. "But as the talks are going on with a certain procedure, there is no need for me to meet." The king said that the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) was under the Parliament. "No one can mobilize the RNA until and unless decided by the Security Council, which has the Prime Minister and Defense Minister" in it. (Centrist "Nepal," V/fortnightly, 8/18)

-- "King-Maoist alliance to erase 1990

achievement": Nepali Congress president Girija Prasad Koirala expressed suspicion that the king and the Maoists had forged an unholy alliance to abolish the achievement of the 1990's popular movement that restored democracy in the country. ("Kantipur," 8/13)

-- King, Maoists forge unholy alliance: Pokharel: CPN-UML Standing Committee member Ishwor Pokharel accused (8/14) the king and the Maoists of attempting to denigrate the multiparty democracy. Pokharel said that there could be an unholy alliance between the king and the Maoists to scrape the 1990 Constitution through regressive means. ("The Kathmandu Post," 8/15)

14. NEPAL-U.S.

-- U.S. clarifies its stance on antiterrorism: The U.S. Embassy in Kathmandu clarified the "misunderstanding" reflected in recent public statements and some media reports on the Antiterrorism Agreement (ATA) signed by Nepal and the U.S. on April 25 this year. The Maoists had demanded the scrapping of the agreement in one of its letters addressed to the government on the resumption of the peace talks. Since October 2000, the Embassy said, almost 200

Nepali police officers from both the Nepal and the Armed Police Force have been trained under ATA, at a cost of approximately one million dollars. ("The Kathmandu Post," 8/16)

-- Senator Feinstein to reintroduce garment bill: Senator Dianne Feinstein recently wrote a letter to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs assuring that she would reintroduce a bill in the U.S. Senate Finance Committee proposing a quota and duty free access for Nepali garments to the American market. ("The Kathmandu Post," 8/12)

15. OTHERS

-- Weapons seized from Maoists: The security forces seized two truckloads of weapons hidden by the Maoists at a former army man's house in Khotang district. (Centrist "Deshantar," V/W, 8/17)

-- Landslides claim 15 soldiers, one civilian: Fifteen army personnel have died and five, including an army major, were killed in a landslide in Rasuwa district following torrential rains and thunderous lightening. (Media reports, 8/17)

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